

## **Protecting Our Future: Sustainable Development Partnerships**

**April 21, 2005**

**Milton L. Charlton  
Counselor for Environment, Science, Technology, and Health Affairs  
United States Embassy Seoul**

**Thank you, Mr. Washington, for your kind introduction.**

**Mr. Kang Young-hoon, President of the Korea Committee, United Nations Environmental Program; Mr. Cho Yun-syng, Chairman of the Global Environmental Forum; Professor Yoon Yong Soo; and guests: I'm delighted to have this opportunity today to share some thoughts about ways to advance toward our common goals of environmental preservation and sustainable development.**

### ***Earth Day***

**The date for this event, of course, was not chosen at random. Tomorrow marks the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Earth Day. The anniversary will be an opportunity for Americans and the citizens of other nations to renew their commitment to preserving our natural heritage, and with it, to protecting the future of our children and our planet.**

**For the first Earth Day, on April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans turned out all over the country to demand that society pay more attention to cleaning up the nation's air and water and to protecting the environment from future harm. It was a seminal event that helped move environmentalism from the intellectual fringe to the mainstream of American politics.**

**Groundbreaking federal legislation followed the success of the first Earth Day. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was established that same year, and the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act soon followed. Not long afterward the Endangered Species Act was passed. Among the many far-reaching provisions of these bills was the requirement that automobiles use unleaded gasoline, achieve a minimum number of miles-per-gallon, and be equipped with catalytic converters to reduce the amount of toxic fumes released by automobile exhaust.**

**Environmental organizations, some newly founded in the early 70's, gained adherents and a new boldness in pushing for a new way of looking at our environmental heritage. Americans began to think about grass-roots strategies such as recycling. By the mid-1990's more than 20 percent of America's municipal trash was being reused and converted into useful products.**

### ***Joining Hands for Sustainable Development***

By 1990, Earth Day evolved from an American tradition into an international one. That year more than 200 million people around the world participated. This helped set the stage for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro. The Rio Conference underscored the importance of international cooperation to advance our common interests in a cleaner environment, while bringing new attention to the concept of sustainable development.

Sustainable development recognizes the importance of economic growth and social development for reducing poverty and global inequality, but stresses the importance of reducing the impact of growth on the global environment.

To ensure effective follow-up of the commitments made at the Rio summit, the UN created later in 1992 the Commission on Sustainable Development. Currently, the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development is meeting in New York. Surely it is not entirely a coincidence that the Session is scheduled to end on April 22, Earth Day.

#### *Enormous Challenges, Ambitious Goals*

The 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development is devoted to three important themes: water and sanitation; human settlements; and sustainable development partnerships. The goal is not just to set targets but to lay out viable policy options -- ways that real progress can be made.

I am delighted that Professor Yoon Yong Soo plans to devote his talk to water. The issue is a very timely one. The UN estimates that at least 1.1 billion people, mostly living in developing countries, do not have access to safe drinking water. Diseases spread by contaminated water, particularly diarrhea, kill more than two million people every year, mainly children. Think about that for a moment – somewhere in the world a child dies from a preventable water-borne disease *every 15 seconds*. Asia is greatly affected by scarcity of clean water, or of any kind of water. China has the second-lowest per capita water availability in the world, and large parts of northern China's agricultural lands lack sufficient water supplies – aggravating the “yellow sand” problem that also plagues Korea.

The UN's goal is to halve by 2015 the proportion of people lacking clean drinking water.

Progress toward that goal will depend substantially on improving sanitation services. The UN estimates that 2.6 billion people, more than half of the citizens of the developing world, lacked access to improved sanitation in 2002. It is estimated that 756 million people living in East Asia lack such services. Again, the UN goal is to slash by half the proportion of people without basic sanitation by 2015.

Another theme for this session of the Commission is human settlements. The global population is expected to grow by 50 percent over the next 50 years, adding three billion new inhabitants of the planet. Virtually all that growth is expected to take place in the cities of the developing world, and much of it will swell the slums in those cities. Currently almost 1 billion people live in slums, about one third of the world's urban population. The UN goal is to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020.

### *Implementation is Key*

The challenges are enormous. The goals are worthy. The question is how best to achieve them, how to turn intentions into practical progress. Implementation is key. And that brings up the last theme of this years Commission session: sustainable development partnerships.

Ten years after the Rio summit on Environment and Development, the world's leaders met again in Johannesburg in 2002 to take stock of progress and map strategies for going forward. One of the important results of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development was an explicit recognition of the importance and potential of sustainable development partnerships. Such voluntary partnerships mobilize resources and expertise from the public and private sectors, and from international organizations, for practical implementation of strategies to promote sustainable development.

During the Summit, some 209 partnerships were launched or given official acknowledgement. By now, the number has grown to more than 300.

### *Partnerships are an Essential Tool*

Partnerships provide a critical link between internationally agreed development goals and the on-the-ground ideas, efforts, and resources of governments, civil society, and the private sector. Governments alone cannot solve the world's problems. Partnering with nongovernmental organizations, international organizations and businesses leverages additional resources and brings new energy and ideas to maximize benefits. The Global Development Alliance of the U.S. Agency for International Development demonstrates this potential: it has used official development assistance resources of \$500 million to leverage an additional \$2 billion in contributions from partner organizations.

When the partnerships include local organizations and entrepreneurs, the benefits are magnified, through institution- and capacity-building and through technology transfer. As one example, the *Water for the Poor Initiative*, a partnership supported by the U.S. government, has established over 3,000 water user groups. These groups now have the know-how and the training to make decisions and implement programs by themselves, without being dependent on outside help.

Let me explain this initiative in more detail, since it is one of the major ongoing development efforts of the United States. Through this international partnership, the United States will contribute \$970 million dollars – almost a trillion won – over three years in some 20 countries worldwide to improve access to water and sanitation, strengthen watershed management, and increase water productivity in industry and agriculture. Concrete examples make such an enormous figure more understandable. In the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, the program used a partial loan guarantee of \$400,000 to leverage \$6.4 million in bonds for local infrastructure improvements. In just one township, local leaders used the funds made available through this innovative approach to increase the water supply from 2 liters to 3.5 liters per person per day. Projects like this make a real difference in people's lives.

A related initiative, the *Safe Water System Partnership*, brings together a broad array of sponsors. It has distributed, or sold at low cost, over 8 million bottles of disinfectant solution. This simple technology provides affordable safe drinking water. Each bottle can generally provide one person with enough treated water for drinking and cooking for six months.

#### *U.S. and Korea are Partners*

Partnerships like the *Water for the Poor Initiative* are oriented toward development in poor countries and regions. Other partnerships bring together advanced countries like the United States and Korea to expand the frontiers of environment-friendly technology.

For example, the U.S. and Korea are partners in the *International Partnership for the Hydrogen Economy*, a public-private partnership that includes 15 countries and the European Union, to promote research advancing the transition to a hydrogen economy. Hydrogen is a virtually pollution-free fuel. Hydrogen-powered cars could dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector.

Korea and the U.S. are also partners in other major energy research partnerships. Nuclear energy provides some 40 percent of Korea's electricity. Our two countries are engaged with several others to foster international cooperation on the next generation of safer, more affordable, and more proliferation-resistant nuclear energy systems, through the *Generation IV International Forum*. Such systems may be used to produce not only electricity but hydrogen.

Looking further to the future, our two countries are also supporting the creation of an experimental fusion reactor demonstration project, called *ITER*. This is an enormous technological challenge, but one with the promise of providing virtually limitless and pollution-free energy.

Korea has also expressed its intention to join the U.S.-led *Methane-to-Markets Partnership*. I have heard that Korea is doing some innovative work in recovering

methane from landfills to generate electricity. Capturing the methane not only permits generation of relatively clean energy, but it also reduces emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas that is more than 20 times as heat-trapping as carbon dioxide, the most abundant greenhouse gas. These experiences will provide important data for the 2006 and 2007 sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which will focus on energy for sustainable development and climate change.

Korea and the United States are also cooperating in regional initiatives in Asia. A huge challenge in Asia is deforestation. Korea and the United States are both members of the *Asia Forest Partnership*, which seeks to promote sustainable forest management through capacity-building, strengthening of forestry governance, and combating illegal logging.

#### *UNEP is also a Partner*

I know that the activities of UNEP are of particular interest to this group. UNEP is naturally involved in many of these global partnerships. One example where UNEP plays a big role, acting as clearinghouse for the 65 other public, multilateral and private partners, is the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles. This partnership is helping to reduce vehicular air pollution in developing countries by promoting the elimination of lead in gasoline and encouraging the adoption of cleaner vehicle technologies. Phasing out lead, eliminating human exposure to this heavy metal, has an immediate effect on a population's health and on the quality of the air they breathe. Progress has been considerable: over half of all gasoline sold in sub-Saharan Africa is now unleaded, and nine sub-Saharan countries have eliminated lead from gasoline.

The UN division of Economic and Social Affairs is host to a website that offers information on all of the more than 300 global partnerships so far registered. More than three quarters of them have secured funding and are hard at work in addressing sustainable development and environment goals. Any organization with a commitment to a partnership's goals and a capacity to contribute is welcome to contact the lead partner.

For more information, check out [www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships).

Information about partnerships sponsored by the United States and its aid programs can be found at [www.sdp.gov](http://www.sdp.gov).

#### *Conclusion*

So, as we approach Earth Day 2005, we should all be mindful of the enormity and the complexity of the global challenges that remain, but we can also take heart at the breadth, the complexity, and the promise of the sustainable development partnerships that are bringing diverse players together to show the way toward practical and effective implementation. My country looks forward to continuing to

**work in partnership with Korea, UNEP, and other countries and organizations, to bring about a better and more sustainable future for us all.**

**Thank you.**